

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJ: WRAP-UP ON DUSIT THANI, STANDARD GARMENT AND THE
SO-CALLED "GENERAL STRIKE"

REF: A. BANGKOK 9932 B. BANGKOK 10180 C. BANGKOK 10181

D. BANGKOK 10364 E. BANGKOK 10276

1. SUMMARY. STRIKES AT THE DUSIT THANI HOTEL AND AT
STANDARD GARMENT FACTORY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SETTLED BY
MANAGEMENT'S CONCESSIONS ALTHOUGH EMBASSY HAS HEARD FROM AT
LEAST ONE SOURCE THAT REPORTED BUSIT THANI SETTLEMENT MIGHT
COME UNSTUCK. LABOR DISPUTES WERE SETTLED BY RTG MEDIATION ONLY
AFTER STRIKERS' ATTEMPT TO FORCE A SOLUTION WITH CONFRONTATION
TACTICS FELL ON ITS FACE. A THREATENED GENERAL STRIKE COMPLETELY
FAILED TO MATERIALIZE. THE GENERAL STRIKE FAILED BECAUSE OF
THE BASIC CONSERVATISM OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THAI
LABOR LEADERS; BUT MORE PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF WEAK ORGANI-
ZATION OF LABOR IN THAILAND.

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2. THE LONG AND BITTER LABOR DISPUTES AT THE DUSIT THANI HOTEL AND THE STANDARD GARMENT FACTORY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SETTLED THROUGH THE MEDIATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. IN THE CASE OF THE DUSIT THANI HOTEL, MANAGEMENT REPORTEDLY AGREED TO PAY LABOR THE 750 BAHT MINIMUM WAGE, WHICH LABOR HAD LONG DEMANDED. MANAGEMENT HAD FORMERLY MAINTAINED, WITH RTG SUPPORT, THAT PAYMENT OF SERVICE CHARGE TO THE EMPLOYEES COULD BE COUNTED TOWARDS MEETING REQUIREMENTS FOR A MINIMUM WAGE. MANAGEMENT HAS SEEMINGLY CONCEDED THIS POINT AFTER THE INTERCESSION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE THAI BOARD OF TRADE, HOWEVER, TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT THE RTG-SUPPORTED AGREEMENT MIGHT COME UNSTUCK, REOPENING THE DISPUTE. MANAGEMENT AT THE DUSIT IS APPARENTLY BRISTLING AT RTG'S EFFORTS AT "MEDIATION." THE "RED GAUR" HAVE HOWEVER LEFT THE DUSIT THANI AND MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN REPORTED READY TO RE-EMPLOY 115 WORKERS FIRED DURING THE STRIKE.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACHIEVING A SETTLEMENT AT STANDARD GARMENT. HERE THE EMPLOYEES' CHIEF DEMANDS WERE FOR REINSTATEMENT OF 11 WORKERS WHO EMPLOYEES CLAIMED WERE DISCHARGED ILLEGALLY. IN ADDITION TO CONCEEDING THIS DEMAND, MANAGEMENT ALSO AGREED TO MINOR LIBERALIZATION OF WAGE PAYMENTS TO ITS EMPLOYEES. AS IN THE CASE OF THE DUSIT THANI STRIKE THIS SETTLEMENT WAS ONLY ACHIEVED AFTER THE MINISTER TO THE PRIME MINISTERS' OFFICE, PRIDA PHATTHANATHABUT, PERSONALLY INTERVENED TO ACHIEVE A SOLUTION TO THE DISPUTE.

4. STRIKE AT FIRESTONE TIRE AND RUBBER (THAILAND) LTD, THE ONLY MANIFESTATION OF "MAY DAY FEVER" INVOLVING AN AMERICAN FIRM, WAS ALSO SETTLED. IN THIS CASE MANAGEMENT AND LABOR WERE ABLE TO REACH AGREEMENT WITHOUT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INTERCESSION. MANAGEMENT, IN SIGNING AN AGREEMENT, COMPLAINED BITTERLY THAT LABOR USED "PRESSURE TACTICS AND THREATS OF VIOLENCE" AND THE RTG REFUSED TO ENFORCE LAW AND ORDER.

5. RADICAL LABOR LEADERS' THREAT TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE THROUGHOUT THAILAND IN SUPPORT OF THE "JUST DEMANDS" OF
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THE STANDARD GARMENT AND DUSIT THANI STRIKERS FELL COMPLETELY ON ITS FACE. DESPITE THE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ISSUE OF POLICEMEN "BEATING" YOUNG GIRLS PICKETING THE STANDARD GARMENT PREMISES, LABOR ACTIVISTS WERE NEVER ABLE TO DO BETTER THAN PRODUCE TWO OR THREE THOUSAND DEMONSTRATORS AT LUMPINI PARK. AT NO TIME DID ANY ORGANIZED LABOR UNIONS JOIN THE STRIKE AND AS A MATTER OF FACT THE ASSOCIATION OF STATE ENTERPRISE LABOR UNIONS PUBLICLY

EXPRESSED ITS LACK OF SUPPORT FOR THE ACTIVISTS' RADICAL TACTICS.

6. FINALLY, WITH THE ANNOYING, POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE DEMONSTRATION AT LUMPINI PARK DEFUSED, AND THE DEMONSTRATORS DISBURSED TO THEIR HOMES, THE RTG ANNOUNCED THAT AFTER INVESTIGATION INTO THE CHARGES AGAINST POLICE COLONEL YUTTHANA, NO EVIDENCE OF GUILT HAD BEEN FOUND TO REMOVE HIM, AS LABOR ACTIVISTS HAD INITIALLY DEMANDED. YUTTHANA, POLICE COMMANDER DURING THE FRACAS AT THE GARMENT FACTORY, WAS CLEARLY ACTING ON HIGHER ORDERS. THE MATTER WAS SIMPLY PAPERED OVER BY HAVING YUTTHANA EXPRESS HIS "REGRETS" THAT PICKETERS AT STANDARD GARMENT HAD BEEN INJURED. THIS ACTION ALLOWED ALL SIDES TO SAVE FACE WHILE THE RTG KEPT LAW AND ORDER CONSERVATIVES' SUPPORT BY HOEING THE LINE ON YUTTHANA'S REMOVAL.

7. COMMENT: WITH THE APPARENT END OF THE DUSIT THANI AND STANDARD GARMENT STRIKES, THAILAND HAS EMERGED FROM THE USUAL PERIOD OF LABOR ACTIVISM ASSOCIATED WITH MAY DAY. IN ORDER TO GET A SETTLEMENT IN THIS LATEST WAVE OF STRIKES, THE GOVERNMENT HAS HAD TO ACCELERATE ACTION ON THE LONG REQUIRED REFORMS OF THE LABOR DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN SETTLING LABOR DISPUTES (REFTEL C). IT IS NOT WANT OF GOOD INTENSIONS, HOWEVER, THAT KEEPS THE LABOR-MANAGEMENT SCENE IN THAILAND SO TUMULTUOUS. WHAT HAS BEEN LACKING UP UNTIL NOW IS A GENERALLY ACCEPTED ARBITOR; BE IT A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT, A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OR THE VERY LAWS OF THE LAND THEMSELVES. UNLESS THAILAND CAN BEGIN TO FIND A WAY TO ADMINISTRATIVELY REALIZE SOME OF THE GOOD INTENTIONS ITS LEADERS SO FREQUENTLY EXPRESS, LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO BE TROUBLED.

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